

Turning adversity into advocacy



Retired physician with MS uses his time and talents to help others—and himself.

by **Robin L. Phillips**

During his 23-year career as a neurologist, Dr. Seth Morgan treated hundreds of people with multiple sclerosis. In May 2004, however, he was diagnosed with the disease. Though he retired from his practice in 2006, Dr. Morgan knew his days of helping people with MS would not be over.

After a period of deep reflection, he began to devise a plan. “The wonderful people at the National MS Society suggested that my medical background and location would make me a good advocate to talk to elected officials about MS,” recalls Dr. Morgan, 59, of Chevy Chase, Md., a suburb of Washington, D.C.

“As a practicing physician, I was intellectually aware of our limitations in knowledge about MS. But the impacts of MS really hit home when I was diagnosed,” he explains. “I knew I couldn’t just hope that researchers would figure it out. [I wanted] to spotlight the research into causes of and potential cures for MS, while also advocating for individuals with MS—like myself—and their families.”

Starting close to home

A year after retiring, Dr. Morgan volunteered as a study subject for clinical trials of Gilenya—the first oral MS treatment. Three years later, with input from him and others, the Food and Drug Administration approved the medication. Buoyed by that success, Dr. Morgan urged Maryland legislators to continue funding the state’s advanced stem cell research. He

has also campaigned to make more state and federal dollars available for home care and respite help for caregivers of people with disabilities.

He also volunteers for the Commission on People with Disabilities in Montgomery County, Md. One of the committee's initiatives, called "Respect the Space," enables police to identify and ticket cars with fake disabled parking tags. "People with divergent disabilities [and not just MS] have some similar access issues with wheelchairs and motorized chairs, and problems with parking spots," Dr. Morgan points out.

Translating into action

Born in Spain, Dr. Morgan is fluent in Spanish. "I had a large Latino population in my practice," he says. "I believe there is more MS in the Hispanic community than we know. Over the years, I've tried to get the word out to other physicians; at the same time, I've learned about the impact of MS on Hispanic people and their communities."

Dr. Morgan looks forward to the day we have a cure for MS. "We need more information on which combinations of factors predispose people to MS," he emphasizes. "To accomplish this, I've advocated for a national MS registry."

Dr. Morgan is clear about the reasons for his advocacy. "Frankly, it's self-serving on one level," he admits. "But if we don't do it, who will? Who else will advocate for us and our families?"

Robin L. Phillips is a freelance writer from Houston.

Related story: [Tyler Campbell: Going for the tackle](#). Football star Tyler Campbell huddles with his famous father Earl to defeat MS.

For more information on MS in the Hispanic community, visit mueveteMS.org. Learn how to become an [MS Activist](#).